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30 March 1955

REPORT OF INFORMATION

REQUIREMENT: OCI

SUBJECT : Religion in the USSR

DATE OF INFORMATION: Prior to 1954

SOURCE :

1. The attitude of all religious groups in the Soviet Union toward the government has changed from active to passive resistance in the last fifteen years. During the period 1930-1940 some active opposition was found in the western parts of the Union, but it was effectively removed.

2. The Soviet government, since its inception, has waged a never-ending anti-religious campaign, but the Russian people still maintain deep religious feelings.

by a long range plan of persecution the government hopes to eradicate religion, but it can not be done in this generation nor in the next. At the beginning of World War 2 even unbelievers began to turn to God for help in defeating the enemy. The Politbyuro was thus forced to lessen its persecution of the churches and attempted instead to force them to serve government aims. It was during this period that religious controls

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were gradually relaxed.

3. Ukrainians during the war opened many churches, often in plain houses and with laymen assuming the role of priests. These places of worship remained in operation for some time after the war, but the leaders and self-styled priests were removed and charged with collaboration with the Germans. [] unable to say whether there was any significant upsurge of religion in Central Asia after the war.

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4. Realizing that too many people had returned to religion during the war, the government stepped up its persecution in 1953 and 1954. The facts that many Communist Party members christened their children in church, that high Party members were attending services and that marriages of young Army and Komsomol members were taking place in church signalled an increase in propaganda. At the present time anti-religious propaganda has diminished in order to counteract western propaganda on the subject. ~~MALENKOV~~ and ~~KHRUSHCHEV~~ need the support of the churches as much as ~~STALIN~~ did and have used them the same way. The present attitude emphasizes that the government does not persecute religion, but acts only against enemies of the people who hide behind the church. [] certain

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[redacted]

that there will be no real change in basic purposes; anti-religious propaganda will continue and the press will continue to run critical articles under the by-line of the Communist Party.

5. [redacted] 99% of the servants of the church are agents of the MVD. This includes priests, church cashiers and all other key members. The truly religious intelligent priests were done away with during 1930-1937. Those who survived represented only 10% of the original number. During the war many of these were permitted to return to the churches, but with the establishment of new religious seminaries, all applicants are carefully screened and recruited by the MGB/MVD. The majority are not members of the MVD, but are recruited agents who have been forced by conditions to cooperate with the government.

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6. [redacted] two seminaries in Moscow and Leningrad and one theological academy in Moscow. There may be some Moslem schools in Central Asia. [redacted]

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7. It is difficult to estimate the amount of authority exercised by the priests over their parishioners. Village

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[redacted]

residents who attend church do so at random, when circumstances permit, and then go only to pray. In larger towns there are regular church-goers who have more contact with priests and among whom the priests have much prestige.

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8. After 1930 no new churches were built in the USSR. [redacted] prior to the revolution there were 1600 churches in Moscow as compared to about 10,000. During 1930-1945 church property was extensively plundered, leaving nothing more than the altars and ikons. Sometimes a commission was appointed to list all property and turn it over to local authorities for safe keeping, but this usually did not take place until after most of the property had been stolen. Many of the church buildings were diverted to other purposes, and cupolas were destroyed, bells and crosses were removed, etc. Some of those which were not completely destroyed or altered beyond recognition were eventually turned back to religious use.

9. It is still true that most church-goers are older people. Press attacks on young church-goers have attracted the attention of Westerners and misled them into believing that the number is larger than it actually is. On the other hand, it should be noted that the numbers of the faithful are increasing.

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10. Children in the majority of Soviet families are baptized, usually by near relatives if the head of the family is a Party member. In Moscow a Party official would find it difficult to have his children baptized and pretend not to know about it, so he might send his family to the Ukraine where it could be attended to without his apparent knowledge. Should a Party member admit such knowledge he would probably be openly reprimanded and he might be discharged. In any event, it would be noted in his record and he would henceforth lose all Party trust. His position would be equally as difficult if he should have parents who attend church, even though he himself did not.

11. Toleration of the churches has been very profitable for the Soviet government. During the war the churches whipped up patriotism by praising STALIN and the war effort, and parishioners were led to believe that life would improve after the war. [redacted] as a result of the interview granted by MALENKOV to Patriarch ALEXIS, in the late fall of 1954, the Church will soon begin to lecture against western imperialism and the new danger of an attack on Mother Russia and the Russian Church. In view of the political defeats suffered by the Soviets

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at the Paris Conference and the ratification of West
German rearmament, ALEXIS probably has been instructed
to use the Church's influence again to unite the people
behind the government.

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